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FEW REMARKS

ON THE

EXPECTANT TREATMENT

OF DISEASES.

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P R E F A C E.

THE recent correspondence in a certain Quarterly Review of medicine, more especially that portion which ensued between Drs. Symonds and Combe, involves no trifling differences in our professional faith. The result of the controversy will at some future time be felt to have a tendency, either to advance our science more nearly to the rank of those denominated "certain," or to place it in the degraded category of those whose sole foundation is fluctuating opinion, and not ascertained facts.

No effort, therefore, however humble it may be, which can furnish additional stability to the principles we have long embraced, can be held as futile.

On the one hand, the attempt may lead to severe and searching examination; and if their falsehood be apparent, or their truth liable to the question of honest doubt, then it is our duty frankly to abandon them, and seek a new code of laws and a new mode of action for the future.

The author, however, feels deeply convinced that no such change is impending,—that investigation will only lead to a more reverential and implicit

trustfulness, and to a more complete recognition of the value of the science and practice of medicine, as it has descended to us, enriched by the researches of ages. Fully is he convinced, that, making the proper allowance for an alloy of human error, it is a vast and magnificent commentary on the book of nature, the value of which to the philosophical inquirer is only equalled by the intrinsic excellence of its practical applications.

It is with such feelings that he has, in this brief and imperfect essay, ventured to introduce a few remarks in defence of legitimate medicine to the notice of the profession.

BRISTOL, *July*, 1847.

ON THE “EXPECTANT” TREATMENT OF DISEASES.

IF we ever acceded to the “expectant,” or, as it is erroneously denominated, the “natural” method of treating diseases, we ought to embrace, as the foundation of our faith, a firm and rooted *optimism* in respect to organic phenomena. According to this belief, the superintending power, which we denominate Nature, not only acts by laws which are generally beneficial, but which are suited to every individual peculiarity: in fact, a special providence, of the most minute kind, is invoked for all being. Not only is this power incapable of inflicting evil, but it cannot even permit it for a single instant. Its procedures and ends are so wise and beneficent, that the mind of man, in its loftiest imaginings, can approach neither in the love and wisdom with which they are replete.

To render the idea consistent, our trust in this optimism must not be founded on ultimate results, or on what may happen finally. It must be content with the present. It must not breathe the hope and holy conviction that all *will* eventually be well, tempered with the melancholy thought of present and impending evil, but it must dogmatically assert that “whatever *is*, *is* right.”

This is the Stoical "*πρὸς πάντα*,"—the "*Deus plenus negotiis*," as Cicero somewhat irreverently expresses himself in his celebrated Dialogues,—the "*anus faticida*," of his Epicurean interlocutor, Vellieus.*

Such a theory of special superintendence ill accords with facts.

In the first place, we may observe that the normal and accustomed route of nature is one of pain, decay and death. Man burns out by a gradual oxygenation, and it is only by the introduction of new material that existence is preserved. So "beggarly dependent" is the lord of created things;—so true is the verse of the poet, "*nascentes morimur, et finis ab origine pendet*."

Whether this process of "*eremacausis*," which finally leads to dissolution, be brief or prolonged, more or less physical pain attends it; bearing an occasional, though not a direct, relation to the prudence or virtue of the being who is thus passing through existence.

Such is the most favourable side of the picture: man travelling onwards to old age, and sinking without any marked or violent agony.

Viewed in this light merely, although we may have doubts as to the perfect benevolence displayed, yet there are certainly more indications of it than of evil. Even here, however, we must acknowledge the existence of the latter. Thus we commence our inquiry, with the recognised fact that pain, decay and death, in the noblest organizations that ever peopled our planet, are the inevitable steps and the unavoidable termination. We may, indeed, partially explain these on psychological considerations. Pain is, as before observed, occasionally, nay frequently, the just punishment of folly or sin. Decay is

* Vide Cicero, "*De Natura Deorum*."

a process of separation from mundane relations ; and death, with all its terrors, is the dread, but necessary, entrance to an infinitely more sublime condition of existence. Thus contemplated, there would be less reason to place our practice in opposition to Nature's steps. True it is, that we may abate, modify, or even destroy the physical pangs consequent on iniquity ; but there would be no savour of injustice if they were permitted to wreak on the sufferer their full and dire consequences. Nor can we, nor do we wish to impede the progress of that decay which is true mercy,—that failing of the powers in the senile condition which gradually weans man from his mortality. And when “the windows have long been darkened, and the daughters of music dumb,”—when all the senses are steeped in hebetude and marked with incapacity for enjoyment, we might well lament, if we did not know that the desirable termination would soon arrive.

Most of the apparent contradictions in nature, both physical and psychical, may be explained by considerations which, when examined in all their bearings, obliterate the semblance of injustice. Of infinite importance is the thought, that there is a great audit, where the long arrears of joy and pain shall be finally balanced. When too we consider, in addition to this, the transient nature of bodily suffering, and its frequently exhibited tendency to mental improvement, well may we add our feeble amen to the language uttered by the highest teacher of the blessings of affliction, and exclaim with Him, “Blessed are they that mourn.”

But, secondly, and of principal practical importance to us as medical men, is the fact, that every intelligent being is, by virtue of that intelligence, a “*primum mo-*

bile" in creation. He can oppose, in a limited sphere, a new train of actions to those which are at that period existing in the material universe. He can alter the relations of dead matter to dead matter, and of this to organized being, although he cannot change the laws, or modes of action, which regulate their mutual effects. It may be objected to this, that the term "primum mobile" can hardly be applied to the mind of man: it moves itself in accordance with certain laws, and from them it cannot deviate. But if on such grounds an exception be taken, it would involve even Deity; for we may with all reverence affirm, that the Great Being, the whole frame and scope of whose creation is harmony, has no connexion with irregularity of action, and is as far removed from the vagrant and fortuitous characteristics of an Epicurean philosophy as is beauty from disorder, and creation from chaos: lawlessness nowhere exists, either in creation or in the immediate being of God.

Law, therefore, of the sternest and most undeviating description, is no obstacle to the origination of a new train of action; for the relations of matter, both inorganic and living, can be changed at the exercise of intelligent being.

These, then, are the mighty counterpoises on the side of justice and happiness: the first, a thought, built on hope and faith, for continual meditation and never-failing solace; the latter, a motive of practical application (more especially by our profession) for the relief of suffering humanity in the present hour. If we neglect these things, and view the events which befall created being merely in the dull light of present manifestations, surely it would be no blasphemy to maintain that the hand of an Arimanes may be as certainly traced in creation as that of an all-loving God.

In fact, in the words of Dr. Symonds, a “vis vitiatrix” may be discovered as prominently active as a “vis medicatrix.”

It is unnecessary for me to do more than indicate some of these manifestations of evil in the physical universe; and I premised the foregoing considerations lest for a moment I should be deemed to favour the creed of the Manicheist. With the doctrine of retribution of good and evil in a future state, we, as mere medical men, have no concern. But with the second consideration which I have pointed out,—that, namely, which makes the human intellect the grand antagonist of physical evil,—which places the mind of man in opposition to the circumstances (*not the laws*) which produce pain and premature dissolution, we are in every way implicated. That such physical evil exists, that such fatal laws sway our being, exclusive of the progress of natural decay, must be apparent to all. Many of these ills are beyond the reach of individual prophylaxis. The party suffering has violated no law of his organisation. From the moment that the “static equilibrium,”* of the ovum was disturbed by impregnation,—from the instant that growth was assumed,—disease was produced. The law which developed beauty unfolded deformity,—the power which caused increase wielded decay,—the principle of life was pregnant with death.

One of the most striking indications of the existence of this evil tendency in nature is the fact of death occurring in the puerperal condition. In a certain class of cases (placenta prævia, arm presentations, &c.) Nature’s efforts only tend to the death both of mother and child. Strange and melancholy fact, that the very condition necessary for a continuous chain of being should thus cause a link to be rudely snapt! Strange, indeed, that the very

* Liebig.

provision for the perpetuity of the race should thus lead to death! The primeval curse entailed, indeed, sorrow and suffering, but not destruction. Yet so it is. And this fatal consummation, produced as it is by a law of organick life,—the propagation of the species,—is not an accidental and rare circumstance, but occurs in a fixed and definite proportion of cases. Nor is it the result of the effeminate habits of civilization. It occurs amongst the nomadic tribes of the American continent, as frequently as amongst the polished Europeans. In meeting such catastrophes with the resources of art, we afford the only chance of succour to the sufferer. To promptly interfere,—to act diametrically in opposition to the deadly tendencies of Nature,—is the single means left us to preserve the lives thus cruelly jeopardised.

Hereditary disease is another of those great facts on which all the profession are agreed. It is obvious enough. Insanity, phthisis, bodily deformity, mental weaknesses, the pitiable distortion of rickets, or the fearful agony of gout,—such are a few of the prominent diseases which father hands down to son. We do not pause to inquire the justice of this law: a more useful question is whether we have the means of lulling the pain, or resisting the evil? Or do we so blindly reverence the decrees of purely physical being that we hesitate to interfere? Certainly not. We have no respect for such tortures, even though they be arrows from the quiver of “grandam Nature.” We ask not if such sorrows be merited by the poor inheritor of anguish, nor whether our treatment be opposed to those laws of retributive justice, by whose un pitying fiat the child is the victim of his progenitor’s follies. We know that such questions are superfluous and almost impertinent. All such anomalies will be cleared up else-

where, and are even here notably diminished by the use of our intellect. Therefore, if the feeble spine be bulging out, or the ancle turning in, we do not hesitate to oppose this indication of hereditary deformity. Neither do we minister to the increment of tubercle, nor to the development of cutaneous disease, albeit both may be but the sequelæ of some infringement of the physical laws,—but the long bill which, though contracted by the great-grandfather, is demanded with a Shylock's exactness from the life-blood of the great-grandson. In a word, we have other duties than attending to such unprofitable speculations. Be it ours to battle with evil wherever we behold it, even when enshrined by the sanctuary, or holding to the very horns of the altar of Nature.

We might multiply our examples of the career, pernicious as it clearly is to health and life, which the physical laws have a tendency to run. On a large scale, Nature in some parts of the globe seems to band together all her agents of destruction against man. Not to take the most exaggerated example, but one which well suits our present purpose, we may adduce Egypt as an instance of this. In that valley of the Nile, it was by the exercise of the wise laws of prophylaxis and hygiène that her ancient rulers beheld her teem with a countless population. They built their cities on factitious hills; they drained and irrigated the surrounding country; they embalmed the bodies of men and animals; they encouraged the profession of medicine, and bestowed rich rewards on its followers. A far different state of things ensued on the accession to power of the Christian, and subsequently the Mahometan, rulers. "Nature" was restored to her pristine dignity. The sceptre of sanitary law was buried beneath the sand of the desert and the

mud of the Nile. Human intelligence no longer ruled the Delta; but over that once favoured spot presided the genius of Turkish indolence and fatalism, and there brooded like a curse. Not long did such a “natural” method wait for its appropriate reward. The cradle of arts and sciences, the land of the Pharaohs and Ptolemies, was soon desolated by a pestilence, comparatively, if not quite, unknown to antiquity. The plague decimated the inhabitants of Egypt.

The “natural” or expectant method was resorted to with a vengeance in its treatment. The mortality was, about every tenth year, awful, and not a season elapsed without serious losses. As the victims fell they died. Fatalist Turk and frightened Frank agreed on one point,—that it was best not to interfere. No meddling physician administered the potion, no busy surgeon used the lancet, and depopulation threatened Egypt. But a few medical men, chiefly French, have introduced a new system of things. They have done their best, not only to promote wise prophylactic measures, but have endeavoured to meet the deadly Python in its mid career. And success has attended their efforts. They have opened the abscesses,—they have dressed the sores,—they have given stimulants in some cases,—they have bled in others,—they have resorted to all sorts of “artificial and unnatural” proceedings, and they have saved two thirds of their patients. They have even the audacity to promise that if Egypt will return to the wise hygiénic observances of her ancient rulers, she may again acquire the salubrity she enjoyed in the days of Herodotus.

So much for the “*medicina perturbatrix*” and the “*medicina expectans*,” both in prophylactic and curative medicine on a large scale.

It would be but a consistent sequela to the opinion of those who so reverence Nature and all her laws, if they plainly declared that every species of suffering and decay ought to be allowed to proceed unopposed and without impediment. Are they not in themselves the marks of infinite wisdom? Granted;—although in our mortal darkness we cannot see the bearings of them all. Then why oppose them with human art?—why twist aside the wheel of Juggernaut's chariot, or drag the victim out of its fatal route? Because I see in the human intelligence triumphing over the laws of the material universe, making them powerless to evil and mighty to good, the marks of a wisdom if possible more infinite still. Even when we fail to save the human frame from decay, the ~~effect~~ is one of the noblest that can be contemplated. And if for one instant the wheels of destruction are rolled back,—if the sun of life pauses one quiver on the dial noting its downward career,—then a glimpse of immortality is revealed to wisdom.

It would, indeed, be consistent if the expectant school refused to interfere at all between man's frame and disease, or nature, or by whatever name they chose to denote the power which works the ruin of the earthly tabernacle. More honest, by far, would it be if they refused to meddle, believing all efforts to be in vain. This would be a correct corollary from their superstition. Let them, then, adopt the principles of Akinetos,* and say,—

“Do nothing! wait, and that which must come, comes,
Because 'tis so ordained.
Leave God to his work.
The supreme mover of all things, and best,

* *Vide* the Orion of R. H. HORNE,—a work full, not only of beautiful poetry, but of sound philosophy.

Who, if we move not, must himself sustain
 His scheme : hence never moved by hands unskilled,
 But moved as best may be. Be warned ; sit still."

Such do-nothing, lethargic philosophers may feel some interest in the practical illustration which Akinetos gives us of his sentiments :—

"Once I gave water to a thirsting plant :
 'Twas a weak moment with us both. Next morn
 It craved the like ; but I, for 'Nature' calling,
 Passed on. It drooped, then died and rotted soon,
 And living things, more highly organised,—
 With quick eyes and fine horns,—reproached my hand,
 Which had delayed their birth. *What wrong we do
 By interfering with life's balanced plan!*
 Do nothing ! wait,—and all that must come, comes."

Such an exposition is more philosophical, and quite as redolent of practical utility, as the lengthy theories of the expectant sect ; only in the poetical impersonation which has been here presented us of the do-nothing philosophy, death and decay are recognised as unmingled benefits. And, indeed, it is only by such a recognition that these opinions deserve the title of philosophy at all.

I need not extend this subject farther. It is a gross practical heresy in medicine to stand by and watch the course of disease, idly trusting that all will be well. The very fact of its existence should be sufficient to make us distrust Nature's intention. It is, I repeat, a gross practical heresy, alike repugnant to common sense and to the experience of ages. Only can it bear comparison to the folly of him who expected Hercules to help the waggon out of the mud, instead of putting his shoulder to the wheel. Nay, it is worse ; for even the clown of the fabulist did not expect the waggon to help itself,—he knew there must be an extrinsic power applied. With our

“natural” friends, however, a retrograde step is taken,—they expect the human frame to do well without the help of either Hercules or Æsculapius. That frame whose very existence is a continual struggle with the powers of destruction, and which eventually succumbs to them, is expected to right itself when a more than ordinary assemblage of evil incidents are arrayed against it. They expect some hidden “autocratia” to spring up in defence of the citadel. Far better if it had kept sentry to prevent the entrance of the foe there. And now the enemy is within the gates, we are dreadfully nervous lest, in the conflict between the “genius loci” and the intruding demon, some of the beauteous mazes of the labyrinth,—some of the delicate adornments of the temple,—may be destroyed. We therefore unhesitatingly interfere and try our best to hush the turmoil.

To many minds, the very doubts recently thrown on the efficacy of our art have been conclusive against it. “Surely,” they exclaim, “that must be uncertain and ill-assured which admits of dispute on its elementary principles, after so many ages of investigation.”

But the existence of heterodoxy and scepticism in medicine, after the healing art has applied itself to the relief of mortal suffering for two thousand years, is no argument against its truth and utility. As well might we argue against religion from the prevalence of infidelity and superstition, or reason against genuine legislation because two-thirds of the globe are shadowed by the towers of despotism.

The evil lies not with the enlightened science,—nor entirely with its professors,—but with the credulity and ignorance they have to encounter. With, therefore, the progress of man’s intelligence, a correlative respect and

faith will be given, not only to medicine, but to all knowledge having for its object "the glory of God or the benefit of man's estate." Till then, however, we shall have much to encounter; but the final result cannot be doubtful.

"Le Nil a vu, sur ses rivages,
Les noirs habitants des déserts
Insulter, par leurs cris sauvages,
L'astre éclatant de l'univers,
Cris impuissants, fureurs bizarres!
Tandis que ces monstres barbares
Poussaient d'insolentes clameurs,
Le Dieu, poursuivant sa carrière,
Versait des torrents de lumière
Sur ses obscurs blasphemateurs."*

My medical brethren will, I am convinced, pardon me this poetical quotation, apparently so little in unison with the character of a medical essay; but the image here presented us by the poet, of knowledge benefiting ignorance in spite of the efforts of the latter, is more especially applicable to our profession at the present time, when homæopathy, hydropathy, and all other Vandalisms are striving to place their heavy heel on the neck of genuine science.

* Le Franc de Pompignan.

Preparing for Publication in the course of the ensuing year,

A TREATISE ON THE

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT OF DISEASES OF THE CHEST,

IN

INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD.

BY CHARLES WEST, M.D.

Member of the Royal College of Physicians; Physician to the Royal Infirmary
for Children: Lecturer on Midwifery at the Middlesex Hospital;
and Physician-Accoucheur to the Finsbury Dispensary.

THIS volume is intended to form the FIRST PART of a
COMPLETE TREATISE ON THE DISEASES OF INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD.

The materials for the succeeding Parts are in a state of forwardness; but the Author is induced to publish this portion of the work separately, because the affections of which it treats, have, notwithstanding their importance, hitherto attracted less attention than any other of the diseases of children.

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